

In his October 4 column, “This Is the Free-Speech Party?” Richard Cohen fiddles away like Nero, as Washington silently burns.

Armed with a considerable platform from which to educate and affect Post readers, Mr. Cohen wrongly chose to cast the legitimate criticism of both Tom DeLay and Bill Bennett as an assault on free speech, a clear diversionary tactic, all the while ignoring the real crises plaguing our government today.

Mr. DeLay clearly deserves his day in court. Only a jury of his peers can determine if he is indeed a felon. But we don’t need a court ruling to see that today’s Republican Party is deeply and fundamentally corrupt, and that its leadership is hurting America.

The result has been the gutting of environmental laws that have made our air and water cleaner over the last 30 years, the evisceration of our Medicaid program in an era where 40 million working Americans are already without health insurance, and the creation of the largest deficit in American history.

Congress has become a place where the bills are stacked with giveaways to oil companies and pharmaceutical giants, a place where special interests are in the back room writing the laws, while the American people are forced to listen through the door.

Ironically, there is an assault on freedom of speech in our government today, but not the one Mr. Cohen falsely proclaims. Democrats have a full legislative agenda – one that would mitigate much of the damage done in recent years, and even restore fiscal sanity to our government. But it has been locked in the basement by an unethical Republican leadership determined to control the debate at all times.

Abusing their power, Republicans have instituted a regime where of the thousands of substantive bills offered by Democrats during this Congress alone, only one has even been debated on the House Floor...One.

In fact, the House Rules Committee is sadly known in Washington as the place where free speech and democracy go to die. Nearly 80 percent of the time, the Republicans who control the House have blocked ideas and amendments offered by Democratic Members from even being considered on the House Floor, disenfranchising half of the American people in the process.

This deliberate censorship of the voices of our constituents represents a real attack on free speech in the House, one that even Mr. Cohen should be upset about.